



United States Department of Agriculture
National Food and Agriculture Council

We are pleased to present the comprehensive Service Center Modernization Plan of the USDA County-based Agencies. The plan is a strategic as well as tactical road map to modern and efficient program delivery in the 21st century. The plan presents a dilemma in that it requires a significant investment in the future at the same time that we face increasing program levels and workload, and decreasing budgets and staffing levels. The competition for limited resources highlights the need for, and our commitment to, a seamless, county-based presence in rural America that provides up-to-date, responsive, effective, and cost-efficient USDA services to customers in partnership with communities and other governmental and non-governmental partners.

The plan establishes the benchmark we started from when the Secretary announced the County Office Streamlining Plan following the President's signing of the Federal Crop Insurance Reform and Department of Agriculture Reorganization Act of 1994. The plan also articulates our vision for future Service Center operations. When fully implemented, the plan will deliver a modern infrastructure, which provides our customers and front-line employees with user-friendly reengineered business processes supported by state-of-the-art technology. The plan focuses on the core business of the partner agencies and the needs of our customers. It also responds to important recommendations from internal and external reviews of our modernization efforts by the Office of the Chief Information Officer, the Office of Management and Budget, and the General Accounting Office.

We commend the Service Center Modernization Plan of the USDA County-based Agencies to you for your support as we work together to bring about our vision for USDA Service Centers — *to reach out and deliver programs to customers in a manner that is responsive to their needs, treating each with dignity and respect.*

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Inga Smulkstys, Deputy Undersecretary for
Operations and Management
Rural Development

A blue ink signature of Keith Kelly, written in a cursive style.

Keith Kelly, Administrator
Farm Service Agency

A large, stylized blue ink signature of Pearlle S. Reed, written in a cursive style.

Pearlle S. Reed, Chief
Natural Resources Conservation Service